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AUTHOR Williams, Carol W.
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ABSTRACT

Extending an earlier analysis by Giovannoni and Becerra (1979) that compared attitudes of Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites toward child abuse and neglect, this discussion provides an in-depth analysis of responses by Black parents. Vignettes describing situations of potential risk to children were rated by 129 Black respondents. The vignettes illustrated 13 categories: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional mistreatment, fostering delinquency, nutritional neglect, medical neglect, lack of supervision, drug/alcohol abuse, lack of cleanliness, educational neglect, problematic parental sexual mores, inadequate clothing, and inadequate housing. Findings were analyzed at both a categorical and individual vignette level. Results indicated that the categories of sexual abuse, fostering delinquency, and lack of supervision were ranked as the most serious. Intra-category item ratings indicated that the most serious scores were given to vignettes in which parents actively involved children in delinquent behavior, left children alone, exposed children to illegal drugs, and physically abused children in bizarre ways that presented a danger to the child. A clear distinction was made between physical abuse and reasonable corporal punishment. While some results can be interpreted in terms of research on Black culture, it is concluded that more needs to be known about normative childrearing and patterns of discipline in order to place the findings in a cultural context. (CB)

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Black Perspectives on Child Abuse

by

Carol W. Williams

Director of Programs
National Child Welfare Leadership Center
Post Office Box 3100
Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514

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ABSTRACT

Black Perspectives on Child Abuse

A survey was given to 129 Black respondents asking them to evaluate the seriousness of vignettes describing the maltreatment of children. The respondents ranked the categories of sexual abuse, fostering delinquency and lack of supervision as being the most serious. Within the category of physical abuse, a clear distinction was made between physical abuse and reasonable corporal punishment.

BLACK PERSPECTIVES ON CHILD ABUSE

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a good deal of controversy over the role of culture in child mistreatment. There has been a suggestion that Blacks have a cultural acceptance of abusive behavior directed toward children because of the violence and racial oppression they have experienced (Gil, 1970). Others have suggested that the child rearing practices which different racial and ethnic groups employ may have the consequence of placing children in situations where they have greater vulnerability to maltreatment.

Recent data coming from the National Study of the Incidence and Severity of Child Abuse and Neglect (1981) have found that Black children are underrepresented in all categories of neglect and abuse, except educational neglect. While comprising 15% of the total population, the incidence of mistreatment of Black children occurs in the following proportions: physical abuse -- 13%; sexual abuse -- 11%; and emotional abuse -- 7%. In the area of neglect, the proportion of Black children reported for physical neglect is 15%, emotional neglect 11% and educational neglect 27%. Black children in families having less than $15,000 annual income have a lower incidence rate than White children in families of the same income. These findings contradict earlier studies which have found an overrepresentation of children of color (Gil, 1970; Simons, Dorons, Huster, Archer, 1966). Speculation was that

cultural factors in some way contributed to a higher incidence of abuse.

Very little is known about the role of culture in child abuse and neglect. Cultural differences may involve different value orientations, different child rearing practices and different evaluations of situations placing children at risk. In a cross cultural study of lay persons' attitudes toward abuse and neglect, Black and Hispanic respondents rated specific incidents of abuse and neglect more seriously than did White respondents. Black respondents rated 58% of the vignettes as being a more serious risk to the child than did White or Hispanic respondents. Specifically Black respondents rated those vignettes reflecting failure to provide and lack of supervision much more seriously than other groups. The differences among groups were not influenced by education or income. (Giovannoni, 1979). These findings do not support the notion of a subcultural acceptance of abuse and neglect; on the contrary the data indicate more stringency by Blacks in their evaluation of risks to children. Given these findings this paper extends the analysis of Giovannoni and Becerra[1] by moving away from a comparative view of Blacks and focusing on an indepth analysis of Black responses at both a categorical and individual vignette level.

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1. The author wishes to thank Drs. Giovannoni and Becerra for permission to utilize the data from Defining Child Abuse.

METHODOLOGY

The data reported in this article were collected in an opinion survey conducted in 1977 and designed to document lay attitudes toward child mistreatment (Giovannoni, 1979). A set of 156 vignettes was developed which described situations of potential risk to children. The vignettes described thirteen different patterns or categories: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional mistreatment, fostering delinquency, nutritional neglect, medical neglect, lack of supervision, drug/alcohol abuse, cleanliness, educational neglect, parental sexual mores, inadequate clothing and inadequate housing. With each category a number of scenarios were developed in which the seriousness of the risk to the child varied. For example, the physical abuse category ranged from burning a child to spanking a child with a hand. From this set of 156 vignettes a subset of 60 were randomly selected for rating by each respondent.

Respondents were asked to rate each vignette independently on a scale of 1 to 9 based upon the seriousness of the risk to the welfare of the child. A ranking of 1 indicated minimal risk, while a rank of 9 indicated the most serious risk. Each vignette was placed upon a separate card and respondents were given a sorting board with envelopes for each of the nine levels. Respondents were asked to place the card in the envelope which reflected their evaluation of the seriousness of the vignette. Demographic data were also collected from the respondents. The data were collected by trained research interviewers who

interviewed clients in their own homes.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

The subjects who composed the sample in this research were one stratum of a larger ethnically and racially diverse sample drawn from the Los Angeles Metropolitan area using a multi-stage, stratified random sampling procedure. There were 129 Black respondents in the sample. The majority of respondents were female (62%), while men made up 38% of the sample. The age distribution ranged from 17 to 60 or more years of age. Seventeen percent of the sample was between the ages of 17 and 25 years. Nineteen percent were from 26 to 32 years of age. The modal age category was 33-44 years of age as evidenced by a 28% representation. Twenty-two percent of the respondents were 45 to 59 years of age, leaving 13.5% aged 60 or over.

The marital status of the group varied with 45% being currently married. Sixteen percent were divorced and 9.3% separated. Eighteen percent were never married and 11.6% had lost their spouse through death. The major religious affiliation of the respondents was Protestant (82.9%), with 6.2% identified as Catholic and 1.6% identified as Jewish. No religious affiliation was indicated by 7.7% of the sample while 1.6% indicated they were affiliated with other groups.

The respondents were asked to identify the highest level of education completed. Twelve percent had completed grade school and twenty percent had had some high school education.

High school graduation was achieved by 28.7% of the sample. The most frequently attained educational level was "some college" for 31% of the respondents. Eight percent of the respondents were college graduates and there were no persons achieving a post-graduate level of education. Labor force participation was indicated by 58% of the sample leaving 42.2% unemployed. The respondents were most frequently employed in clerical (16.4%) or operative positions (15.6%). Seven percent of the sample were in professional and technical positions while 3.9% were employed as managers. Respondents employed as craftsmen or foremen comprised 3.1% of the sample, while less than 1% were working as salespersons. Persons employed in other positions constituted 11% of the sample.

Sixty-three percent of the sample earned less than $10,000 total family income with 28.6% earning under $5,000. The modal income group was $5,000-$9,999 (33.9%). Twenty-one percent earned between $10,000-$16,999 per year while 14.3% earned $17,000-$24,000. Three percent of the respondents earned $25,000 or more.

The representativeness of the sample can be examined by comparing its demographic characteristics with those of 1980 census data for the City of Los Angeles on the variables of gender, age, marital status and presence of minor children. The sample had more females than the general population. (See Table I). With regard to age, the sample under study had the same proportion (64%) of persons under 44 as the general

Table 1, Comparison of Sample With
US Census Data for City of Los Angeles

	SAMPLE	CENSUS DATA*
Gender		
Male	38.0%	45.6%
Female	62.0%	54.4%
Age**		
15-44	64.0%	64.0%
44-59	22.4%	19.0%
60 +	13.6%	16.9%
Marital Status		
Never Married	17.8%	37.0%
Married	45.0%	37.6%
Separated	9.3%	8.6%
Divorced	16.3%	13.3%
Widowed	11.6%	8.4%
Presence of Children		
None	42.6%	44.4%
Children Present	57.4%	55.6%

*Computed from U.S. Census Bureau General Population Characteristics: California 1980. Washington, D.C.: United States Census Bureau Table 31,p 6-257.

**Census data use 15 years while the sample uses 17 years as the cut-off age.

population but had a greater proportion of persons between the ages of 44 and 59. (Twenty-two percent as contrasted with 19% for the Los Angeles City population.) Finally, the respondents had fewer persons over 60 than in the general population.

There were also differences in relation to marital status. The major difference was that the "never married" status was twice as frequent for the Los Angeles City population as it was for the respondent sample. The other marital statuses (married, separated, divorced and widowed) occurred in greater proportion for respondents with "married" being 12% greater than the census data. The presence of children in the respondent group was 2% greater than in the Los Angeles City population (57.4% as compared with 55.6%). In summary, the sample utilized in this study were more likely to be female and married than the general population. These differences are noted with respect to the generalizability of the findings presented here.

THE FINDINGS

The findings will be presented in the following manner: the ranking of categories of child mistreatment; an analysis of the ratings of individual items in selected categories; and finally a presentation of the highest and lowest-ranking of items irrespective of categories.

Categories of Child Mistreatment

Using the mean scores of all answers within each of the 13 child mistreatment categories, a ranking order based on

perceptions of seriousness was developed. (See Table II). Sexual Abuse ($\bar{X}$ = 8.18) was rated with the greatest seriousness followed sequentially by fostering delinquency ($\bar{X}$ = 8.06) and lack of supervision ($\bar{X}$ = 2.85). Physical abuse was 8th after categories of emotional mistreatment and nutritional neglect. Ranked 4th through 10th were: medical neglect ($\bar{X}$ = 7.68), drug/alcohol abuse ($\bar{X}$ = 7.67), emotional mistreatment ($\bar{X}$ = 7.58), nutritional neglect ($\bar{X}$ = 7.48), physical abuse ($\bar{X}$ = 7.41), educational neglect ($\bar{X}$ = 7.40) and cleanliness ($\bar{X}$ = 7.40). The categories of mistreatment at the end of the continuum were: sexual mores of the parents ($\bar{X}$ = 7.09), inadequate clothing ($\bar{X}$ = 6.70) and inadequate housing ($\bar{X}$ = 6.47). The most notable finding in this rank order was the high level of seriousness with which fostering delinquency and the lack of supervision was regarded when contrasted with the low level of seriousness for the category of physical abuse.

Clearly, sexual abuse and fostering delinquency require parental acts of commission which place the child at social and legal risk. The lack of supervision by contrast involves acts of omission and the way in which it is evaluated must be seen in the context of the Black family's cultural milieu and functional tasks. Nobles (1976) has indicated that one of the residuals of the African cultural contexts which remains with the Afro-American family is the high value placed on children because of the emphasis on human continuity and the importance of extending family units into the future. Additionally, the

Table II Ranking of Child Mistreatment Categories by Mean Scores

Categories of Child Mistreatment	Mean Score of All Items In Category*
Sexual Abuse	8.18
Fostering Delinquency	8.06
Supervision	7.85
Medical Neglect	7.68
Drug/Alcohol	7.67
Emotional Mistreatment	7.58
Nutritional Neglect	7.48
Physical Abuse	7.41
Educational Neglect	7.40
Cleanliness	7.40
Sexual Mores	7.09
Clothing	6.70
Housing	6.47
Range of $\bar{X}$s: 8.18 - 6.47	

*The ratings reported are based upon the X scores of vignettes with and without consequences.

socialization of Afro-American children occurs in the context of racial oppression, and requires families to socialize child to function within their own Black context and within the broader non-Black community. The socialization task is combined with the families' responsibility to buffer and/or mediate transactions between the child and the larger community as a protective function (McAdoo, 1974; Barnes, 1972; Billingsley, 1968). One might speculate that these factors, the value of children, dual socialization and the buffering of children heightens the importance of supervision in the rearing of Black children. The importance of supervision may be reinforced by the potential dangers which are present in those Black communities which are plagued by limited income, high unemployment, inadequately functioning schools, and disproportionate levels of crime.

Intra-category Item Ratings

While the ranking of categories gives one a view of the Black respondents' priority concerns, an analysis of the items within each group reveals certain patterns which influence the priorities. The most seriously rated forms of mistreatment were sexual abuse, fostering delinquency and lack of supervision. The sexual abuse category had five items which included sexual intercourse, mutual masturbation, fondling, verbal suggestion that adult and child have intercourse, and repeated exposure to pornographic pictures. The range of mean vignette scores was

8.70-7.85 which suggests that all sexual mistreatment items were ranked with a similar degree of seriousness whether they involved actual sexual contact or provocative behavior on the part of an adult.

Fostering delinquency, the second most serious category, had three items whose mean scores ranged from 8.33 to 7.60. Among those items the most serious scores were given to vignettes in which parents actively involved their children in delinquent behavior, i.e., "parents make their child steal" ($\bar{X}$ = 8.26) or "parents make the child take stolen merchandise to the store that sells it illegally" ($\bar{X}$ = 8.33). The item which was at the bottom of this narrow range was one which suggested parental acceptance of delinquent behavior, and possible exposure of the child to delinquent behavior i.e., "allowing an uncle to store stolen goods in the home" ($\bar{X}$ = 7.33).

Lack of supervision was the third most serious category. The vignettes varied on the following dimensions: whether the child was left alone or with others; day time or nighttime, inside or outside the house, and frequency of occurrence. The five vignettes which received the most serious rankings were those in which the child was left <u>alone</u>. The time, frequency and location did not significantly effect the ranking. For these Black respondents, leaving children alone may reflect a parent's serious failure to meet both the protective and the socialization function for their children. By contrast, the

two least serious vignettes were those in which the child had been left with caretakers. (See Table III). Making a poor choice in caretakers was better than making no supervision plan at all and leaving the child with the grandmother posed no serious risk to the child ($\bar{X}$ = 6.94). The ranking of this last vignette is consistent with data on the social support functions of the Black extended family which includes child care as one of its exchangeable resources (McAdoo, 1980).

Table III. Mean Scores on Lack of Supervision Vignettes

Lack of Supervision Vignettes	$\bar{X}$	SD
Regularly left child alone in house during day; often not returning until dark.	8.40	1.00
Regularly left child after dark, often as late as midnight.	8.39	1.28
Left child alone all night once.	8.08	1.31
Left child alone inside after dark, often not returning until midnight.	7.91	1.75
Left child alone outside until dark regularly.	7.67	1.90
Regularly left child with neighbors; no one in charge.	7.58	1.92
Left with grandmother, for long periods of time.	6.94	2.34

In the area of drug and alcohol abuse, the eleven vignettes were varied in relation to the substance, the level of parental involvement, and whether activity occurred alone or with others. The scoring reflected the degree of social acceptance of the substance to which the child was being exposed and was not influenced by other factors. Cocaine and heroin were viewed as the most serious risks (range of $\bar{X}$s: 8.54-8.00). Although close in scoring, marijuana (range of $\bar{X}$s: 7.74-7.56) was viewed as being more serious than alcohol (range of $\bar{X}$s: 7.53-6.97). With the use of cocaine/heroin and marijuana, greater concern was expressed when the child was exposed to the substance (i.e., being present at drug parties). When contrasted with alcohol, the greatest concern was expressed when the parent became incapacitated. By becoming drunk, parents were unable to provide the child with adequate supervision and direction.

Within the area of physical abuse great variability occurs ($\bar{X}$ = 8.52-4.92). The physical abuse vignettes ranged from mild physical punishment to cruel actions which would result in serious injury. Based upon scores, the vignettes can be dichotomized into two groups: bizarre behaviors which present danger to the child and behaviors which can be deemed reasonable corporal punishment. The five vignettes which represent extreme behavior include burning a child in hot water ($\bar{X}$ = 8.57); or with cigarettes ($\bar{X}$ = 8.54); banging a child against a wall ($\bar{X}$ = 8.24); hitting a child in the face with a fist ($\bar{X}$ = 8.03); and hitting a child with a wooden stick ($\bar{X}$ = 7.64). The reasonable corporal

punishment items which were acceptable to the respondents were spanking with a leather strap ($\bar{X}$ = 5.91) and spanking with the hand ($\bar{X}$ = 4.92). (See Table IV). The different levels of acceptance are reflected in the fact that the mean score for all extreme items is 8.20 while the mean score for punishment items is 5.4.[2] The data indicate a clear disavowal of the bizarre and the injurious by Black respondents. At the same time there is an acceptance of corporal punishment as a part of discipline. The separation between these groups of behavior is clear and may be explained by looking at physical abuse as actions which occur when a parent is out of control and his/her judgment about the nature and consequences of his/her action is impaired. By contrast the punishment behaviors are actions consciously taken by individuals who are in control of themselves for the purpose of managing specific behaviors. There is within the Black community a tolerance for reasonable punishment and a clear rejection of physical abuse. The more bizarre the behavior, the greater the level of agreement between respondents as indicated by the standard deviation scores.

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2. If one were to place the dichotomized categories in the rank order of categories of mistreatment, injurious behavior would be ranked highest in degree of seriousness and punishment would be the last order. See Table II.

Table IV. Mean Scores on Physical Abuse Vignettes		
Physical Abuse Vignettes	$\bar{X}$	SD
Child immersed in tub of hot water.	8.57	1.12
Burned with a cigarette on buttocks and chest.	8.54	1.16
Banged child against wall while shaking him/her by shoulder.	8.24	1.42
Child hit in face with fist.	8.03	1.62
Struck child with wooden stick.	7.64	2.16
Punish by spanking with leather strap.	5.91	2.89
Punish by spanking with hand usually.	4.92	2.69

Parental sexual mores are the sexual behaviors of the parents which could be viewed as placing children at risk. There is some variability in the scores on the individual vignettes which lends them to grouping. The vignettes included prostitution in the home by the mother or another relative; bringing home different men; the child observing intercourse, and the sexual orientation of the parents. (See Table V).

Table V. Mean Scores on Vignettes in Parental Sexual Mores Category		
Sexual Mores Vignette	$\bar{X}$	SD
Parents permit prostitute to bring customers to the home. Child knows this.	8.34	1.17
Parents have intercourse where child sees.	8.16	1.73
Divorced mother often brings home different men.	7.43	2.35
Mother is a prostitute.	7.14	2.41
Father is a homosexual.	6.42	2.66
Mother is a lesbian.	6.21	2.77
Mother has intercourse with steady boyfriend often.	5.96	3.05

The vignettes can be separated into a high scoring group ($\bar{X}$ = 7.0 or more) and a low scoring group ($\bar{X}$ = 6.99 or less). The high scoring items are those items in which the child is exposed to sexual activities including prostitution and the observation of intercourse. The low scoring items deal with the sexual orientation of the parents and a stable sexual relationship with an adult friend. The sexual behavior of the parents is viewed as a serious problem only when the child is repeatedly exposed to sexual activity.

The two mildest forms of child mistreatment were problems with clothing ($\bar{X}$ = 6.7) and housing ($\bar{X}$ = 6.47). The clothing vignettes were ranked at the same level ($\bar{X}$s range: 6.88-6.38), showing little variation.[3] The vignettes on inadequate housing described crowded living quarters, unkempt living situations, limited household facilities and dangerous living conditions. The mean scores ranged from 7.52 to 5.05. The most serious situations were those in which there was danger: living in a skid row neighborhood and being accosted by residents ($\bar{X}$ = 7.52) and living in an old house with broken windows ($\bar{X}$ = 7.36). Mid-range scores included: living in a house where no one cleans up ($\bar{X}$ = 6.94) and living in a hotel room without cooking facilities ($\bar{X}$ = 6.72). The least offensive of the housing situations involved living in limited space ($\bar{X}$ = 6.23; 5.05).

It is noteworthy that clothing and housing are of the least concern to Afro-Americans. Given the reality that the material

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3. The sample was drawn from Los Angeles, California, a city with a normally temperate environment. Had the sample been drawn from a colder region the clothing response might have been different.

resources available to Black families are often scarce, it is not surprising that the limitations on clothing and housing are not viewed as child maltreatment and evidence of parental failure unless there is imminent danger to the child. Respondents were able to separate limited material resources from high risk situations.

Thus far the analysis of the data has examined the rank order of child mistreatment patterns and the ordering of items within each of the patterns or categories. Neither of these approaches reveals the interaction among individual vignettes irrespective of mistreatment category. The next section shall discuss the highest and lowest ten vignettes as ranked by Afro-American respondents.

INTERCATEGORY VIGNETTE RANKINGS

Each category of child mistreatment had multiple vignettes with a range of mean scores as well as a single mean score for the pattern. However, when the general categories are ignored and the vignettes are ranked according to their individual scores, a new picture emerges. The mean scores of the ten highest rated vignettes ranged from 8.70 to 8.27. Table VI shows that the category which showed up most frequently in the ten highest rated vignettes is physical abuse of which there are three vignettes. The scenarios included burning a child and banging a child against a wall. Sexual abuse, drugs, lack of supervision and fostering delinquency each have two vignettes ranked in the top ten. The

Table VI. Vignettes with the Ten Highest Ratings Irrespective of Category

Vignette	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Pattern/Category
1. On one occasion child and parent engaged in sexual intercourse.	8.70	1.30	Sex Abuse
2. Parents immersed child in tub of hot water.	8.57	1.12	Physical Abuse
3. Parents burned child on buttocks and chest with cigarette.	8.54	1.16	Physical Abuse
4. Parents allowed child to stay when they experimented with cocaine.	8.54	0.99	Drugs
5. Parent and child engaged in mutual masturbation.	8.47	1.17	Sexual Abuse
6. Both parents were drug addicts.	8.37	1.73	Drugs
6. Parents left child alone inside the house after dark, did not return until midnight.	8.39	1.28	Supervision
7. Parents permitted prostitute to bring customers to house.	8.34	1.17	Sexual Mores
8. Parents made child take stolen merchandise to store which sells it.	8.33	1.45	Post Delinquency
9. Parents made child steal small articles.	8.26	1.64	Post Delinquency
10. Parent banged the child against the wall.	8.24	1.42	Physical Abuse

*$\bar{X}$ are for vignettes with and without consequences for the child.

most serious form of sexual abuse involved sexual contact between adult and child. Drug scenarios involved the use of cocaine and/or heroin. These findings indicated that although the overall categories of physical abuse and drug involvement were not ranked highly in regard to their seriousness, those individual vignettes indicating extreme behavior are found in the top 10 items. This further corroborates the Black community's ability to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior toward children.

An examination of the ten least serious vignettes reveals that most vignettes reflect the lowest ranked categories of child mistreatment: housing, clothing, sexual mores and physical abuse-punishment. Of least concern to parents were physical abuse items which described corporal punishment (i.e., spanking by hand ($\bar{X}$ = 4.92) or leather belt ($\bar{X}$ = 5.91). Also of minimal concern was inadequate living space ($\bar{X}$ = 5.05; 5.23). From the category of sexual mores of the parent, the three vignettes dealt with the sexual orientation of the custodial parent. (See Table VII).

The least serious vignettes suggest the Black community's acceptance of corporal punishment as a legitimate way of managing children's behavior, an acceptance of diverse sexual orientations of parents and an ability to distinguish between limited material resources and child neglect.

Table VII. Vignettes with 10 Lowest Ratings

Vignette	Overall Rating	Category
1. Parents punish by spanking with the hand.	4.92	Physical Abuse
2. Parents live in apt. with 2 children, few furnishings.	5.05	Housing
3. Parents live with child in two room apartment.	5.23	Housing
4. Parents punish by spanking with a leather strap.	5.91	Physical Abuse
5. Divorced mother has intercourse with steady boyfriend.	5.96	Sexual Mores
6. Divorced mother is a lesbian.	6.21	Sexual Mores
7. Parents seldom notice how child is dressed.	6.38	Clothing
8. Divorced father who has custody is homosexual.	6.42	Sexual Mores
9. Parents do not see that child brushes teeth.	6.51	Cleanliness
10. Parents have not taken child to dentist.	6.58	Medical Neglect

DISCUSSION

Cultural differences appear to influence the way in which Black respondents evaluate the seriousness of child mistreatment incidents. Of major impact were the findings on supervision and physical abuse. The lack of supervision was the third most seriously ranked category with situations in which the child was left alone being of greatest concern. This group of vignettes followed only sexual abuse and fostering delinquency in the severity of ratings. It is speculated that supervision is highly valued in the Black context, because it is an important strategy in the dual socialization of children to function in Black and non-Black communities, in protecting children from and mediating negative experience in the larger society, and protection from the dangers in their own environments. The assumed availability of individuals in the extended family and social network for childcare may further increase the negative sanctions which operate against leaving children alone.

The ranking of physical abuse at the eighth position led to an analysis of the items within the categories. The items dichotomized into bizarre treatment of children and corporal punishment. The bizarre items which included burning in hot water and with cigarettes, and banging a child against the wall, were in the ten most serious vignettes. By contrast, the corporal punishment items were viewed as being of minimal concern. The data leads to a two-fold conclusion. The Black community rejects the cruel treatment of children; and the Black community

accepts corporal punishment as a reasonable means for managing difficult behavior. Much of the child abuse literature assumes that corporal punishment is at one end of a continuum and physical abuse is at the other. Perhaps there are really two different continuua--one which operates when parents are rational, exercising self control and are clear about the behavior they wish to change; and a second continuum which operates when parents are out of control, their judgment impaired, and they are reacting to a number of factors not to the child alone. The first continuum might include a range of behaviors which can be identified as cruel and unreasonable actions toward children. How two continuua of this nature may interact is a topic for further study. The findings are clear that the Black community does not accept cruelty toward children and in fact identifies such behavior as one of the most serious threats to the welfare of its children.

Little is known about the actual use of corporal punishment in either Black families or non-Black families. Erlanger has pointed out that differences in the use of physical punishment among groups has been used to characterize the disciplinary methods of the group. (Erlanger, 1974). The variety of methods of corporal punishment, and their pattern of utilization are unknown. Additionally, there is no data which would indicate that the use of corporal punishment is correlated with a higher incidence of physical abuse.

The data reported here indicate a sanctioning of corporal

punishment and the data from the National Incidence Study (1981) indicate an underrepresentation of Black children in reports of physical abuse. These two pieces of information challenge the notion that abuse is related to acceptance of corporal punishment. In order to place the findings of this study in cultural context more needs to be known about normative child rearing and the patterns of discipline which are utilized among Black families.

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